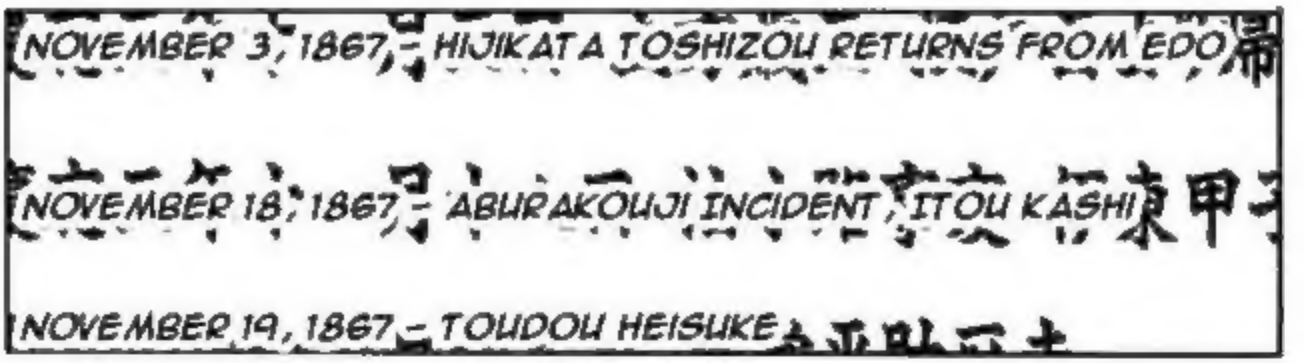
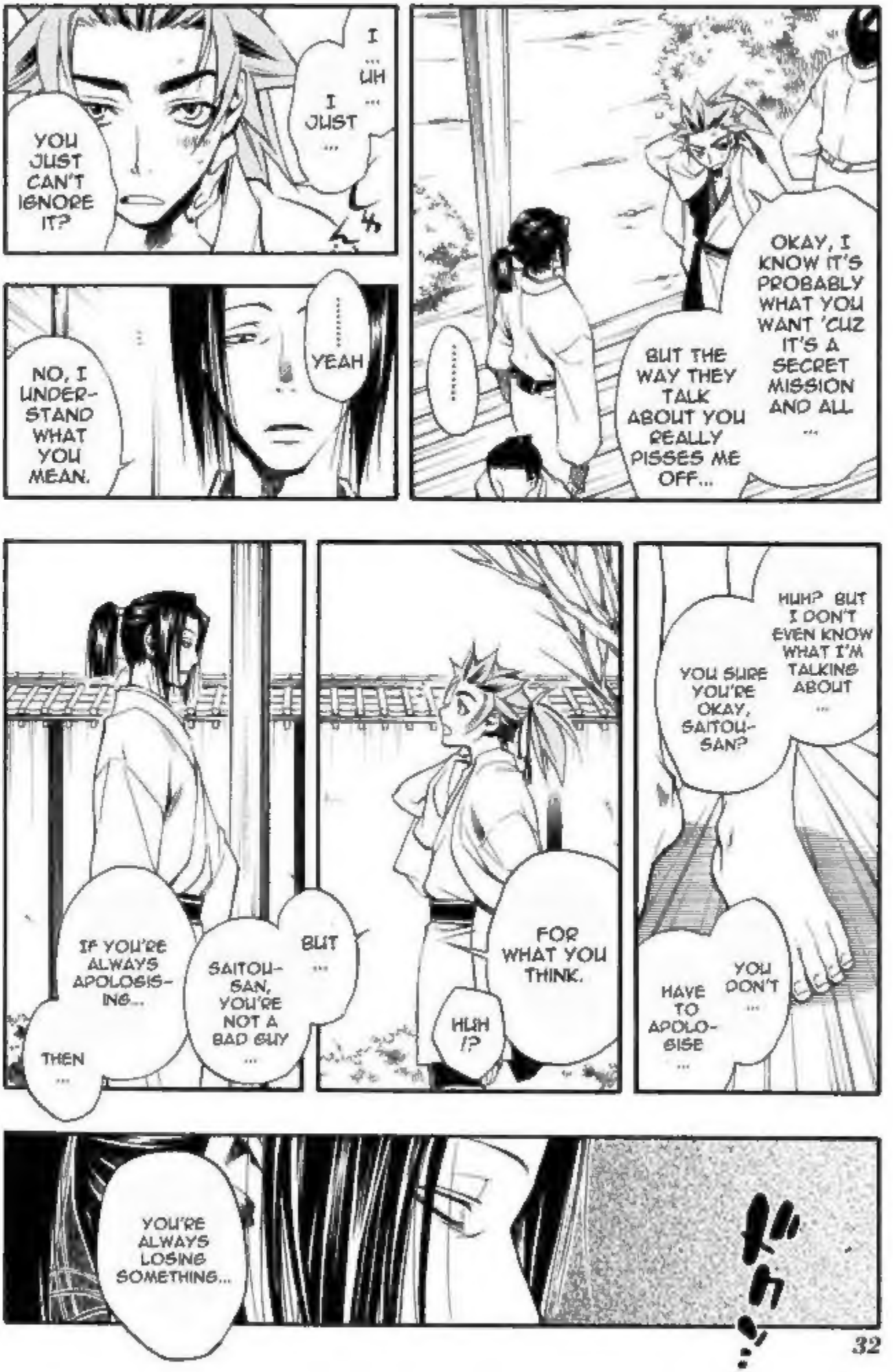
CHAPTER 23
SNARE


NOVEMBER 3, 1867 - HIJIKATA TOSHIZOU RETURNS FROM EDO
NOVEMBER 18, 1867 - ABURAKOUJI INCIDENT, ITOU KASHI
NOVEMBER 19, 1867 - TOUDOU HEISUKE

I'VE JUST RECIEVED ORDERS FROM THE KYOKUCHOU FOR A MISSION AT THE TENMAN-YA INN.
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN, CAPTAIN?
I WANT THE THIRD DIVISION ON STANDBY AT HEADQUARTERS.
YES, SIR.

NOTE: THE TENMAN-YA INCIDENT OCCURED ABOUT 3 WEEKS AFTER ABURANOKOUJI. SOME SHINSENGUMI WERE GUARDING AN OFFICIAL AND THEY GOT ATTACKED BY RYOMA'S MEN.

DID YOU HAVE SOME BUSINESS WITH ME?
EEEP!!
YEAH, KIND OF...
.....
I...
UHH...
I KNOW YOU WERE ORDERED TO LEAVE WITH ITOU'S GROUP...
AND IT'S YOUR BUSINESS WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO DO...
BUT YOU SHOULD HEAR THE STUFF PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT YOU! CAN'T I SET THOSE ASSHOLES STRAIGHT?
.....
.....


I ... UH ... I JUST ...
YOU JUST CAN'T IGNORE IT?
OKAY, I KNOW IT'S PROBABLY WHAT YOU WANT 'CUZ IT'S A SECRET MISSION AND ALL ...
BUT THE WAY THEY TALK ABOUT YOU REALLY PISSES ME OFF...
.....
YEAH
NO, I UNDER-STAND WHAT YOU MEAN.
HUH? BUT I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT ...
YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY, SAITOU-SAN?
YOU DON'T ... HAVE TO APOLO-GISE ...
FOR WHAT YOU THINK.
HUH!?
BUT ... SAITOU-SAN, YOU'RE NOT A BAD GUY ...
IF YOU'RE ALWAYS APOLOGIS-ING... THEN ...
YOU'RE ALWAYS LOSING SOMETHING...
!!

NOT WHAT I WAS EXPECTING...
SORRY ...
THAT'S ...
HMM ...

DON'T LET THOSE JERKS GET TO YOU!
THIS PLACE IS YOUR HOME! WE'RE LIKE A FAMILY, RIGHT?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT A THING! YOU'VE BEEN AWAY FOR EIGHT MONTHS, BUT...
I THOUGHT ALL THAT STUFF WOULD BOTHER YOU, BUT...

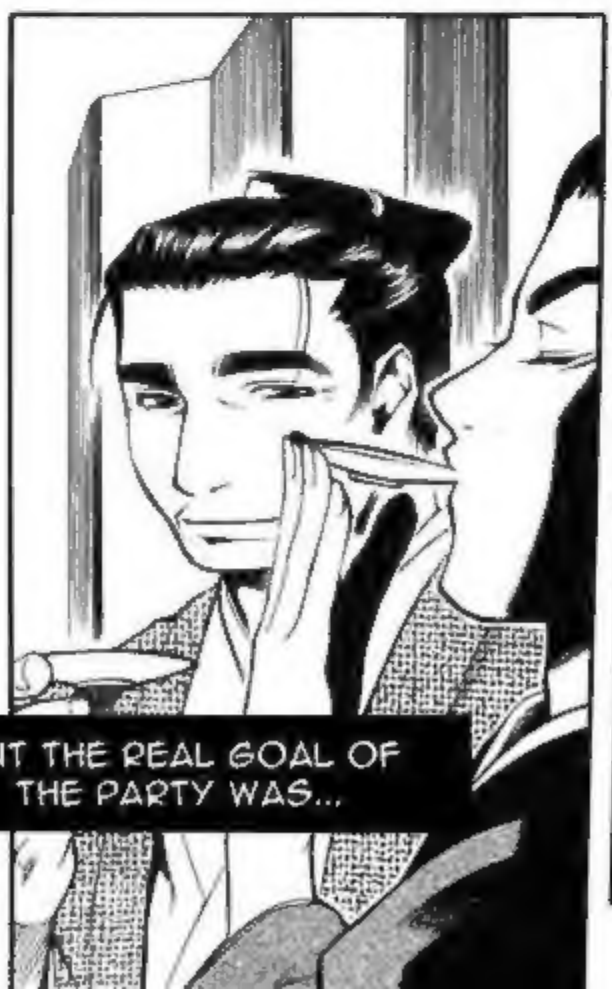
.....
SO DON'T BE SO GLOOMY!
BUT REMEMBER, "TOMORROW IS A NEW DAY!"
I DON'T BLAME YOU FOR LOOKING DEPRESSED!!
NO, REALLY ... I WASN'T ...

MAYBE THINGS WILL START LOOKING UP FOR THAT ITOU GUY, TOO!
THE KYO-KUCHOU IS GONNA MEET WITH HIM TO-MORROW! MAYBE...
MAYBE THEY'LL BE FRIENDS AGAIN!
AND THEN TOUDOU CAN COME HOME TOO!

NOVEMBER 18, 1867 - THE ABURAKOUJI INCIDENT.

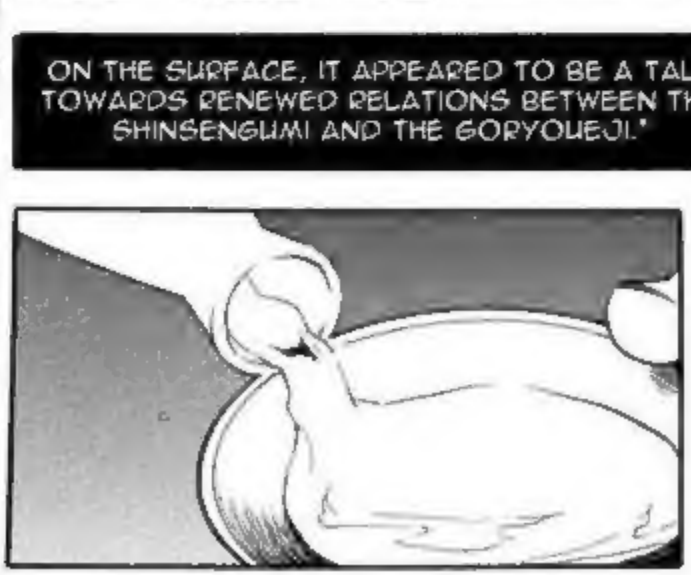
*IF YOU'VE FORGOTTEN, ITOU'S GROUP IS CALLED THE GORYOUEJI, ALTHOUGH SOMETIMES YOU'LL SEE THEM CALLED THE KOUDAIJI PARTY AS WELL - THE GORYOUEJI AND THE SHINSENGUMI WERE ORIGINALLY AFFILIATED BUT OBVIOUSLY THERE WAS A BIT OF A FALLING OUT, LOL, SINCE ITOU PLOTTEN TO KILL KONDOU...

ON THE EVENING OF THE 18TH, ITOU KASHITAROU WAS INVITED FOR A DRINK AT THE HOME OF KONDOU'S MISTRESS.



BUT THE REAL GOAL OF THE PARTY WAS...

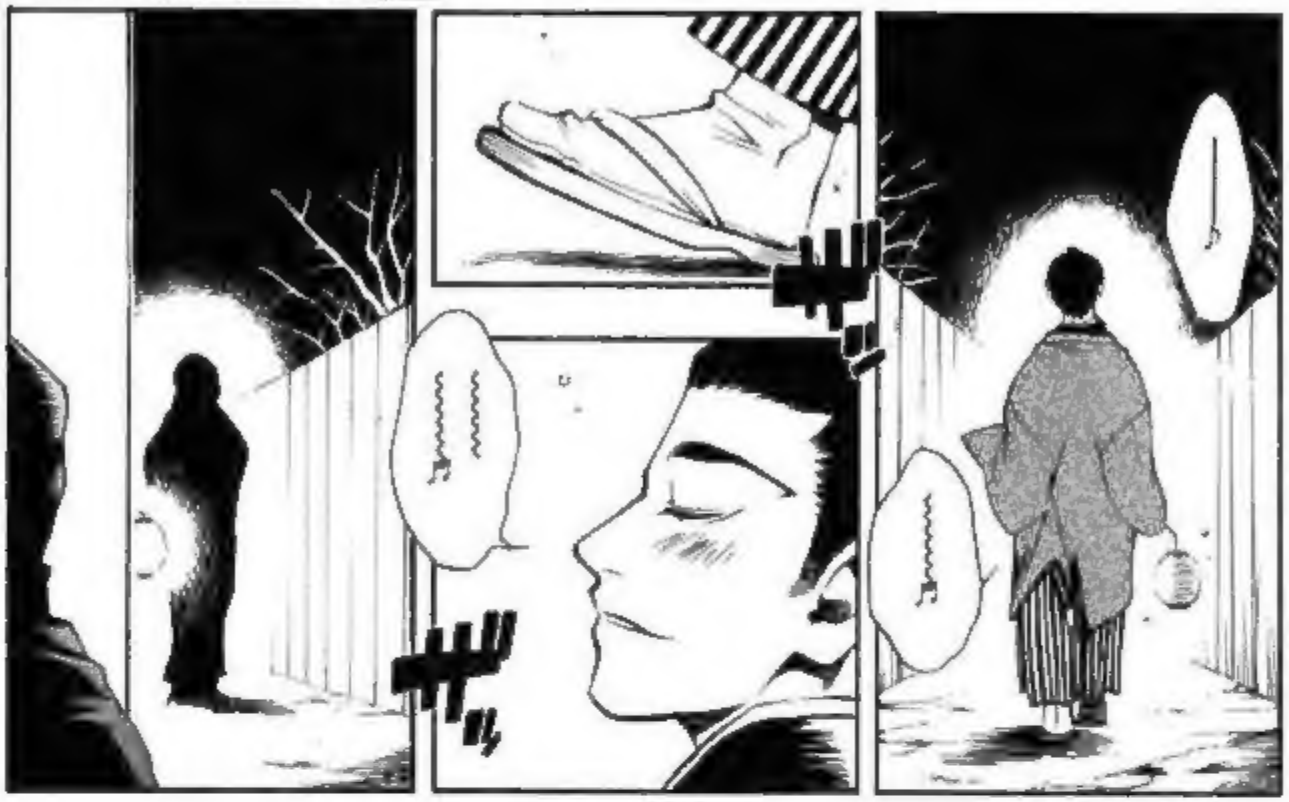
ON THE SURFACE, IT APPEARED TO BE A TALK TOWARDS RENEWED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SHINSENGUMI AND THE GORYOUEJI."



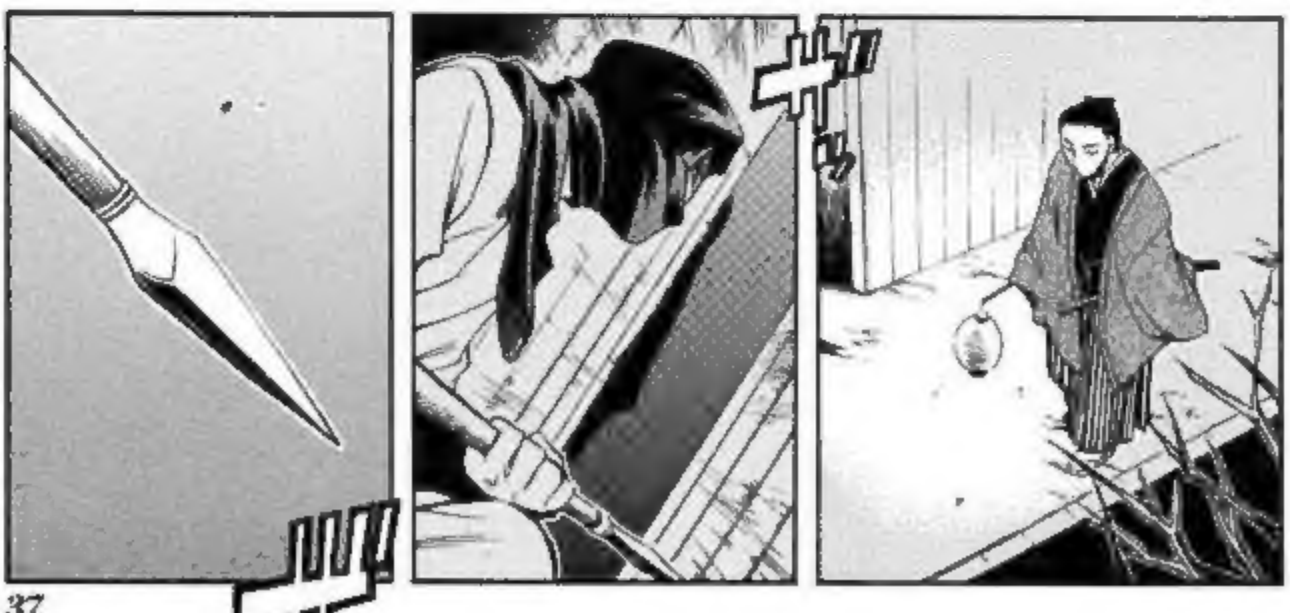
TO MAKE ITOU TOO INTOXICATED TO FIGHT.

AHAHAHA, OH NO, IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I'VE HAD THAT MUCH FUN.
I THINK I'VE HAD A LITTLE BIT TOO MUCH TO DRINK...
OHOHO HOHO.... UFUFUFU-FUFU...
YOU'RE SUCH A GOOD LIAR~
UFUFU-FUFU, THAT'S SO LIKE YOU, KONDOU-SAN...
.....AH
BUT SADLY, I CAN'T IMPOSE ON YOU TONIGHT. MY CUTE LITTLE GORYOUEJI BOYS ARE WAIT-ING FOR ME-
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE AL-RIGHT? MAYBE YOU SHOULD SPEND THE NIGHT...
NEXT TIME, WE'LL HAVE TO GET ALL OF THE SHINSEN-GUMI AND ALL OF THE GORY-OUEJI TO-GETHER AND HAVE A BIG PARTY...

IT GREW LATE, PAST MIDNIGHT, AND ITOU CAME TO A CROSSROADS.



THERE, IN THE ABURAKOUJI NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE SEVENTH WARD, THE SHINSENGUMI WERE WAITING FOR HIM.



ITOU KASHI-TAROU... IS HE....
DEAD ...

WE'RE ALL SINNERS HERE. WE DO WHAT WE HAVE TO DO TO SURVIVE.
ITOU PLOTTED AGAINST US FIRST.
... THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN EXPLAIN OUR SINS AWAY.
THIS SAKE WAS... TOO COSTLY.
BUT YOU TALK TOO MUCH WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'RE WRONG.
THAT'S FINE FOR YOU TO SAY, TOSHI..
IN SITUATIONS LIKE THIS, YOU HAVE TO FORGET SAMURAI HONOR.
FORGET IT, IT'S NOTHING.
I ALWAYS WHAT?
WHAT?
YOU ALWAYS ...
THAT I CAN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT THIS .
I NEED TO GET SO DRUNK...
I NEED A DRINK

COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
JUST HOLD ON ...
!!
OKITA-SAN!!
AH ... AH ...
IT'S COMING OUT ...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO STAY WITH ME
YAMA-ZAK I-SAN
I'M FINE, REALLY
...JUST DRINK THIS HOT WATER

YOU SHOULD BE IN THE MEDICAL OFFICE. I'M SURE THAT TONIGHT..
I KNOW, AND THAT'S WHY ..
NO, I CAN'T DO THAT. I'M A DOCTOR...

I'VE BEEN DREADING THIS DAY ...
THERE WILL BE A LOT OF WOUNDED PEOPLE.

HERE, THERE, EVERY-WHERE
IT ALL REEKS OF BLOOD.
THE LOCAL MER-CHANTS HAVE TIES TO THE KOUDAIJI PARTY AND REPORT TO THEM. SO THEY EVEN KNOW WHEN WE GET A NEW MEMBER.
IT'S VERY LIKELY THAT THE GORY OUEJI ARE ALREADY MOVING
GOOD. YOU'VE DONE VERY WELL.
HM ?
WHAT'S WRONG, YO-KOKURA? WHATEVER IT IS, SAY IT WHILE YOU'RE HERE
WELL
ITOU'S ASSASSI-NATION WENT EX-ACTLY AS PLANNED
I LEFT HIS BODY AT ABURAK-OUJI.
GOOD. NOW HOW WILL WE MAKE SURE HIS GORY-OUEJI COM-RADES GO THERE?

WAS I PREPARED TO DELIVER THE FINAL BLOW, HE MOVED TO COUNTER-ATTACK ME
THE SURPRISE ATTACK WAS A SUCCESS AND ITOU WAS FATALLY WOUNDED BY THE FIRST BLOW FROM MY SPEAR BUT HE DIDN'T DIE RIGHT AWAY

YES, SIR.
IT'S FINE YOU'VE DONE WELL, AND YOU'RE DISMISSED.

GOD-DAMNED HOKUSHIN ITTOU RYUU PHILOSOPHY

CHE ...
THAT'S JUST LIKE HIM ..

..I WONDER IF THEY'LL COME
THEY'LL COME

WE LEFT HIS BODY LYING IN THE ROAD. THEY'LL COME, EXACTLY AS WE WANT THEM TO
TOSHI..

"STEP"
"STEP"
WHAT ABOUT ... YOU KNOW WHO...?
THERE'S NO ONE HERE..
BUT THIS HAS TO BE THE PLACE
!
THERE, IN THE CROSS ROADS.
IN THAT PALAN-QUIN...!?

THAT'S ... REALLY
ITOU-SENSEI!!
SEN-SE!!
SENSEI
ITOU-SENSEI!!
...!

SHOW YOURSELVES
IF YOU'RE GOING TO KILL US, DO IT SHAMELESSLY

AS YOU WISH.
WE'RE THE SHINSEN-GUMI.

THE MOTIVE OF THIS ATTACK IS BECOMING CLEAR
HIDING YOUR SHADOWS UNDER A BLOODY NEW MOON.

TONIGHT IS A POOR STAGE FOR YOUR PERVERSE IDEA OF "FIDELITY"...
TO LEAVE A BATTERED CORPSE IN THE STREET
"CORPSE"..?

AH... AH
ITOU-SENSEI...

I.. I NEVER
I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD HAPPEN LIKE THIS
YOU TOLD US THAT SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
BUT I

WELL THIS IS GOING TO BE INTER-ESTING
!!?
CAPTAIN! WE'RE SUR-ROUND-ED!!
WHAT IS
WHAT WHEN DID THEY ?

DAMN IT... THERE'S MORE OF THEM!
I CAN SEE THAT, SANO. THEY'RE ROUNIN ...
IT LOOKS AS IF THEY'RE JUST HIRED MERCE-NARIES.
MU HA HA HA
.....
BREAK THEIR CIRCLE AND FIGHT THEM ONE BY ONE CONCEN-TRATE ON WHATEVER GUY IS IN FRONT OF YOU!!
BUT CAP-TAIN ..
UNLESS YOU WANNA DIE, YOU'VE GOTTA BEAT TEN GUYS!
YES, SIR!
WHAT!?
UNLESS YOU JUST WANT TO TURN TAIL AND RUN AWAY, YOU KNOW-
WELL IT'S GOOD THAT YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT THE NUM-BERS!
AH, I SEE!
I LIKE FIGHT-ING AGAINST THE ODDS, BUT I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS... OH WELL...
.....

WHY THE HELL DO YOU WANT TO KILL US!?

!!?

?
SANO
..
すっ
...

IT'S NOT US
. . . THEY .
THEY INTEND TO DESTROY THE SHIN-SENGUMI ...!!!

KONDOU -KYOKUCHOU!!
STOP PANICKING, YOU FOOL!!
KYO-KUCHOU!
THEY'RE SHOOTING FLAMING ARROWS FROM SOME-WHERE .!!
THEY'VE GOT THE WHOLE BASE SUR-ROUNDED!!
GET THE SICK AND WOUNDED TO SAFETY IN THE CENTER OF HEADQUAR-TERS!!
AS FOR EVERYONE ELSE, GET EVERY MAN WHO CAN MOVE EQUIPPED AND READY TO DEFEND THE COMPOUND!!
WET YOUR CLOTHES AND WAKE EVERYONE!!
I WANT HALF OF OUR MEN FIGHTING THE FIRE, AND THE OTHER HALF AS-SEMBLED IN THE MAIN HALL AND READY FOR BATTLE!!
JUST STAY CALM!!
"COUGH" "COUGH"
CAN YOU STAND, OKITA -SAN?

THE FIGHTING ...
IT'S ITOU'S FREINDS COMING FOR REVENGE, ISN'T IT?
コボッ
コボ
NO.. IT SEEMED THAT WAY ON THE SURFACE AT FIRST

STRANGE RONIN HAVE SURROUNDED THE HEADQUARTERS. IT'S NOW APPARENT THAT THIS WAS ALL PLANNED.
.....

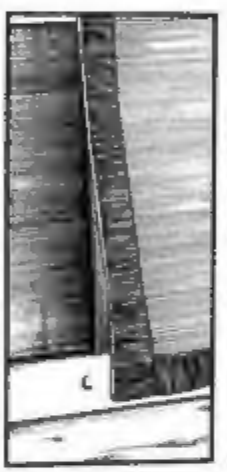
KONDOU-SAN, YOU'RE NEEDED HERE
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO ME, YOU HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF EVERYONE

ドロ
ナ!!
WE ALREADY SENT HALF OUR AVAILIBLE FORCES TO ABURAKOUJI!
THERE ARE ALREADY ONE HUNDRED ATTACKERS.. MAYBE IF WE CALLED THEM BACK
WE NEED REINFORCEMENTS AT ABURAKOUJI.

WE HAVE TO GET YOU TO SAFETY...!
OKITA-SAN! IN THAT CONDITION, YOU CAN'T!
HIJIKATA-SAN, I'M GOING TOO...
SOUJI!
KONDOU-SAN... YAMAZAKI-KUN...
LET HIM DO WHAT HE NEEDS TO DO.

DEFEND THE FRONT GATES WITH SPEARS AND GUNS!
FUKUCHOU! THE FIRES ARE ALMOST OUT!!
FUKU-CHOU!!
THE FLAMING ARROWS ARE LESS OF A THREAT NOW, SO MORE MEN CAN FIGHT!!

AH...



AH... AH...

I WANTED TO SEE THAT FACE...
OOH, YOU LOOK SO SURPRISED... IT'S CUTE...
...IT'OU ...!!
I THOUGHT I'D LET YOU TRY TO KILL ME AGAIN~
SO...

ゴオオオオ!!
IT'S BE-GINNING.
.....
"RED HAIR" ...
"ABOUT 16 OR 17 YEARS OLD" ...